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Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire. – William Butler Yeats

When I think back on my journey to discovering I wanted to be a teacher, and the methods I want to use in my own classroom, I think back to the different kinds of teachers that I had as a secondary student. My influences in my journey to discover my passion for teaching range from the teachers that inspired me and helped me form the person I am today, and the teachers that I so violently disliked that I wanted to become a teacher so I could prove them wrong. It was the teachers that made me feel something, positive or negative, that made me realize that this is what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I wanted to spark feeling in students, I want to make them feel as passionately as my teachers made me feel, even if that means sparking anger within them.

As a social studies concentration, my future classroom will focus on a variety of different topics, all of which I hope will inspire feeling and inspire my students to go out and learn more about the world around them. Social studies now, and for most of my secondary education was all about names and dates, and I can only hope that my students will get more out of my class than those simple, watered down facts of the subject. In my mind, social studies is the gateway to the world around us, it's where we learn about our roots as a society, and if presented in such a way, it can not only teach students about the past, it can teach them about the future and inspire them to change our world.

The subject of diversity is something that has always been extremely important to me, textbook and typical classroom history is so rooted in the “white man’s” history, that it can make people from other groups feel excluded. I have distinct memories of being in middle school and high school and thinking “well what about everybody else?” History is diverse, so is our world today, and I feel very passionately about displaying that in my classroom, because depending on where I end up teaching, chances are, my classroom will be as diverse as the world around me. It’s very important to me to not exclude minority groups, who might feel excluded by the exclusivity of their history textbooks and show them that all groups have been key in shaping the world around us, and will continue to be important as we continue to grow and develop as a people.

When I think about *how* exactly I want to present my lessons to my students, I know that I want to stay far away from the typical lecture based classroom, that is so popular among history teachers. While lectures can be helpful in some subject matters and to some students, I don’t think that they should be the basis of the entire lesson. To me value lies in hands on learning, and students being able to learn with and from each other. I believe very strongly in students working together and being able to discuss things that are important to them and learn things from each other, sometimes our best teachers are the people around us and I think that’s something that holds a lot of value in a classroom.

Discussion is something that I, also, personally find extremely valuable and is something that I definitely want to implement in my classroom. I think this is something that holds a lot of value, especially in a social studies classroom, where there are varying opinions on multiple different subjects. As a student, I always got a lot out of discussions in the classroom, and here at

UMF, I have found myself to be more successful in discussion based classes. However, I know that all of these strategies do not work for everybody, I think bringing in a variety of different strategies into the classroom, is the best way to be successful.

During my second year here at the University of Maine at Farmington, I learned all about the eight different multiple intelligences. This was something that I had always figured existed, it's not hard to figure out that people learn in different ways, but I had no idea what the eight different intelligences were, or how important they were in a classroom until then. These multiple intelligences are key to building a classroom that works for all students, and when I think about myself as a future teacher, making sure I adhere to all my student's intelligence is extremely important. I want all my students to feel like they're being represented in my lessons and feel comfortable in my classroom.

By bringing in a variety of teaching methods, all different intelligences can feel comfortable, and I think this is something that holds deeper value in a social studies classroom. While it's already very important to me to bring in these different methods, in order to make learning easier for all my students, looking at subjects in history and other branches of social studies, through multiple different lenses. It can be valuable to all students to learn about history in multiple different ways, because it provides a different outlook, on top of being valuable because it extends to students with different strengths in their multiple intelligences.

When I think about what group of students I want to be teaching, my mind immediately goes to middle school. When I first really realized I wanted to be a teacher, I was probably a junior in high school, I had always played with the idea of being a teacher, but it became a serious goal of mine during my late high school career, and at the time, I thought I wanted to

teach late high schoolers. Maybe it was because of my mind set at the time, or my very common dismissal of how important and special middle schoolers are, but teaching middle school was something that had never seriously crossed my mind. The first time I considered teaching middle school was my first year here at UMF, I was placed in an 8th grade classroom for my EDU 101 mentoring position, working with 8th grade students in their study hall, and I got so much out of the experience, despite only being in the classroom for a total of a few hours over the course of the semester.

My passion for teaching middle schoolers only grew when I was placed in a 7th grade social studies classroom for my practicum experience. Being in that 7th grade classroom was one of my valuable experiences of my entire life, and no words will fully be able to ever describe how special it was to me. Personally, I think middle school is the most formable time in a student's life, and the time in which they are most influenced by those around them. Being able to be in a position to guide middle schoolers into a successful future, and encourage them to learn in a safe and healthy learning environment is a goal of mine that I hope I will accomplish in my time as a teacher. While all students are special, and hold value to them as students, and people, there has always been something special about middle schoolers, and my passion for teaching has only increased since I realized they were the group I wanted to teach.

When thinking about my educational philosophy, my beliefs can best be lined up with those of existentialism, with a dash of pragmatism. The biggest reason that these two philosophies align most with my own is the focus on the students. These two philosophies focus primarily on the student, and the ever changing world around them and that as teachers, we must teach students about the ever changing world, instead of adhering to the old basic knowledge.

My favorite part of existentialism, and the reason that I identify strongest with these ideology of thought, is the focus on self directed learning and reflection. Personally, I think that reflection is one of the most important things that students can do for themselves, and one of the most important things teachers can ask them to do. Being able to reflect, on not only what you've learned, but what you, as a student, got out of it, is an extremely important life skill that I think all students should learn at some point. Reflection of self is something that students will carry with them for the rest of their life, and something that I've always been thankful in being able to do.

Self directed learning and teaching students free choice and creating their own path is another thing that attracts me to the ideology of existentialism and I think is something that sets students up for success in life. Self directed learning teaches students to go after what they believe in and encourages them to look into and study the things that they're passionate about, and passion is one of the most important aspects of a classroom to me. I want my students to be learning the things that they're passionate about and feel like they have an important role in their own learning.

I think that this is something that goes hand and hand with proficiency based education (PBE), which is something I've learned a lot about during my time here at UMF. Since PBE encourages more projects and students taking charge of their own learning, I think existentialism is only going to grow more and more prominently in the years to come, and I'm interested to see how PBE grows in public education, and what kind of effect it has on teachers whose philosophies are less based on students, and more on the classics and the content. A quote that I think helps describe this philosophy, and a quote that speaks to me a lot as a future educator is

“The aim of education should be to teach us rather how to think, than what to think - rather to improve our minds, so as to enable us to think for ourselves.” by Bill Bettie. I think this quote sums up existentialism quite well and I agree a lot with the idea behind it. I want to inspire my students to have the power to form their own ideas, and give them the ability to go out into the world and discover their own opinions and thoughts. This goes hand and hand with the self direction and free choice ideas behind existentialism.

Personally, while content to me, is extremely important and I’ve had dreams about the different things I’ll be able to teach in my classroom, students come before content. This is another idea I think is supported by both existentialism and pragmatism. I think if students are taught how to be successful thinkers and successful learners, then learning the content will come naturally. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said “The secret of education is respecting the pupil.” which is something that I think is very important and something I aspire to implement in my classroom. I think if students feel respected, then they’ll be more comfortable sharing their ideas and feel more like their voice matters.

Along with existentialism and pragmatism, which are more big picture ideologies of philosophy, I also identify strongly with the ideas that are presented with constructivism and humanism, where are philosophical theories. Constructivism and humanism, like existentialism and pragmatism, both focus primarily on the student and how the student can succeed in the classroom. Both emphasis student choice and student thought development and stress the importance of helping mold students into independent thinkers who not only extend their intelligence in the classroom, but also extend their personal development and grow as overall learners, not just social studies learners, in my case.

I think these schools of thought are extremely important to stress in a social studies classroom. So much of social studies is learning multiple sides of different ideas and being able to form your own ideas and thoughts on a subject, based on all the information that you're presented, especially in the overall effort to move social studies towards a more social justice based classroom. These two theories are much more student centered and encourage student thought, and student individuality, all of which are extremely important to me as a future educator. My goal as a teacher is to create a classroom where students feel encouraged and empowered to create their own ideas and are inspired to go out and discover more about a topic when class is over.

This kind of classroom experience is something that I had the pleasure of experiencing with one of my own teachers in high school, my AP English teacher, Mr. Gorey. Unfortunately, I didn't find myself really enjoying the topic of history until I got to UMF, most of my middle and high school social studies teachers being lackluster, but I still had my fair share of inspiring teachers throughout high school and one of them was Mr. Gorey. I've always enjoyed English as a subject, and I credit Mr. Gorey for teaching me how to write a solid essay, but it's never been a favorite subject of mine. I've always loved to read, but writing was never one of my strong suits, but Mr. Gorey's class was always one of my favorites and I credit all of that to his method of teaching.

Though having us read different books and write prompts that actually made us do more than skim through the pages and find a couple of quotes to pull out and string a bunch of words together in hopes of it all making sense, he actually inspired thinking. I did more outside thinking and research that wasn't assigned for that class than I had in any other up to that point in my high

school career. The only class where I did nearly as much as I did for the two English classes I had with him, was my Holocaust history class my senior year, which was more my own personal interest on the subject than the teaching method provided in the class. Mr. Gorey made me interested in a subject that hadn't held much interest to me beforehand, and did that through inspiring prompts and thought provoking conversations that helped me form my own opinions and ideas about a subject. By picking interesting books and general, broad discussion questions that led to individual ideas being formed, I learned how to interpret books and form my own ideas, which is something I want to be able to inspire in my own students.

Another really important thing that Mr. Gorey always inspired in me, and my classmates based on conversations we'd always have about our favorite teachers, in which Mr. Gorey was often at the top of a lot of our lists, is the connection between his class and the real world. The big "why?" question, why is this important? Why do we have to learn this? Why is this something we have to know? Mr. Gorey always helped us understand why what we were learning in his class would be important to us in the future and how we could apply it to places outside of his classroom.

These are all things that I want to bring into my own classroom, especially considering I got all of this out of a class that I didn't consider a favorite. My goal is to inspire in my students, who maybe don't consider history and social studies one of their favorite subjects, what Mr. Gorey inspired in me as a student. Mr. Gorey inspired me to look outside of the classroom with my learning, and to take charge of it and also taught me that nothing I ever think or say is wrong, or dumb and that it's ok for people to all look at something with a different eye and have different ideas about what something means.

One of the major ways he was able to do this was through this classroom set up, which was a horseshoe shape where we all could see each other. Mr. Gorey would sit on a stool in the middle of the horseshoe so he could see all of us as he facilitated our conversation. I think this classroom set up is something that really helped the flow of our discussions and was definitely a factor in the success of discussions. I think a lot about my past teachers and classrooms when I think about how I want my classroom to be set up. I think about how classes where we never talked, and only did lectures were set up in rows of desks, how discussion based classes were set up in horseshoes or circles, and my more project based classes were set up in table groups.

Throughout my time here at UMF, I've learned a lot about classroom set up in my different education classes, and I still am not entirely sure what kind of setup I want my classroom to have. Generally I'm a fan of the table groups, which I think allows for good discussion amongst students and good positions for group projects, but I do think that there's a definite time and place for horseshoes and circles or rows of desks, if the situation is right. I think that having a variety of different kinds of desk and classroom setups can be successful for students and help them work with different people in their class, and sometimes sitting in a different place can inspire new thinking, just be being in a slightly different environment.

I think since starting here at UMF, my ideas of what being a teacher is have changed and grown a lot. I've grown a lot as a student since I was a freshman here, and I think my evolving ideology has reflected that. I didn't understand fully before coming to UMF about how much collaboration goes into being a teacher, and I think that's something that I've really taken away from my experience here, especially in practicum and my middle level class, both of which have

heavy focuses on working with fellow teachers to accomplish a goal and assist students with their learning.

If anything, being a student here at UMF has shown me even more so that my passion for being a teacher is still very much within me and very strong. I've had some struggles along the way and it might take me a little longer than I anticipated to get where I want to be, but I have no doubt that I want to end up in a middle school social studies classroom. I feel extremely prepared to enter the public education system and that's all because of what I've learned during my time here at UMF.

All of my education classes have been key building blocks in my journey to becoming a teacher and only added on and helped develop what I already knew about myself and my future goals when I was in high school. The professors that I've gotten to learn from during my time here at UMF have only heightened my passion for teaching and being an educator. I know that there's going to be a lot of struggles and the education system is going through a transition time currently, but I'm still confident in myself and my ideologies and beliefs that I'll be a successful teacher and I can't wait to get started.